CHAPTER 9

Female Biographies and Family History: An Approach to Social and Political History

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9.1 Introduction

The life stories of Harriet Lathrop Dunham, Alice Hallgarten, Cora Slocomb, Carolina de Viti de Marco and the intergenerational story of the De Viti de Marco-Starace families reconstructed in this book prompt some more general considerations about the political history of women and the most stimulating approaches to investigating it.

It is not our intention to examine the intense scientific discussion on these issues, which has often been interwoven with the extremely lively debate between women's history and gender history. On this debate, Ida Fazio—when recently introducing the Italian edition of Joan W. Scott's book, *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988)—offered an interesting historiographic overview of the various seasons that have marked international studies, highlighting the different meanings, theoretical grounds, developments, juxtapositions and products of women's history and gender history (Fazio 2013, 2016). After years of sharp

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E. Laurenzi and M. Mosca (eds.), *A Female Activist Elite in Italy (1890–1920)*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87159-8_9

theoretical and methodological contrast, today, it is felt that there is a need to overcome the dualism of these two scientific standpoints and to bring them together. This could allow an even more effective contribution to be made in challenging stereotyped methods and interpretative criteria, and to consolidate the approaches to research in cultural, political and social history, starting from the interweaving of public and private spheres, between individuality and citizenship. This debate also stimulates the exploration of new research paths and the systematic, in-depth investigation of documents and archives to trace the presence, role and words of women.

The latest studies published in Italy often mention the historian Gianna Pomata's critical note of 1993 on the use of the historiographic concept of 'gender' and its complicated relationship with women's history. Pomata stated that:

> The first task in the history of women is not, in my opinion, to deconstruct the male discourse on women, but to overcome this dearth of facts about their lives which has made historiography so unreal, so lame, so poor, would I say. (Pomata 1993: 1021)[1]

The exhortation to overcome the scarcity of facts on the life of women has enabled Italian historiography to be less unreal and less shaky, and to produce interesting results both on the theoretical and methodological plane, as well as that of research (Rossi Doria 2003), opening up new issues and new paths.[2]

The political history of women has also moved in this direction. After the political shift that sprang from the great changes in the years 1989–91, there has been a renewal of research into the political dimension of the female presence in history, which risked being submerged and overshadowed by research in social history.[3] Accordingly, it was felt that there

[1] Unless stated otherwise, the translations of the quoted texts are our own.

[2] To interpret power relations in women's history and plural and asymmetrical social relations, the concept of patronage indicated in the pioneering book by Ferrante et al. (1988) is still valid.

[3] Anna Rossi Doria points out that 'the alarm' about the loss of the political dimension of women's history was sounded in the journals *Past and Present* and *Annales* by distinguished historians, respectively Joan W. Scott and the leading French scholars of women's history, about 'the return to a certain 'political history' or rather 'history of the political'' (xvi).

was a need to try out new paths of analysis and research in order to 'give shape to the silence of women'; this is a silence that, as Anna Rossi Doria (2007: ix) writes, 'is particularly oppressive in the political sphere, which for a long time, together with the law, was the place of the greatest exclusion of women'. As far as the contemporary age is concerned, it is a matter of reconstructing the challenging, rocky paths by which women, in different Western countries, with different timing and methods, have achieved 'individuality and citizenship, which are closely connected' (ix).

In a recent work summing up the history of Italian women in the early twentieth century, Perry Willson justifies the choice of chronology in her reconstruction with the need to highlight the importance of the political dimension without necessarily overlooking the social, cultural and economic aspects. She points out that 'politics has been an important force for change in gender relations (although certainly not the only one)' in a society like that of Italy marked by 'a particular mix of modernity and tradition' (2010: 1). The book reconstructs the history of civil and political rights of Italian women's material conditions over two centuries and therefore the transformation of relations between the sexes in said country. It reveals the difficult, winding path Italian women had to face in adapting and transforming their behaviour, buffeted between the opposing forces of aspirations towards new social and cultural models on the one hand, and loyalty to the bonds of family and caregiving on the other. It was a totally original pathway in 'a fascinating mix of modernity and tradition' (Willson 2010: 189). The historian aims to combine the focus on the processes and timing of the transformation of society with the habits and responses of local societies, which differ considerably in the various territorial contexts. However, she specifies that she was not able to make a deeper analysis at regional level of the cultural, economic, social and political processes, which have 'multiple specificities' and which affect 'many aspects of women's lives' (Willson 2010: 2).

As a matter of fact, further research studies are desirable in order to expand Willson's useful summary, and to adopt a differentiated and comparative analysis of women's actions in different territorial and sociocultural contexts. Such an analysis is necessary—for example—in order to avoid the danger of levelling and over-generalising on the North-South dichotomy, seen in terms of development-backwardness.[4] It can

[4] On this point, see the interesting review by Gribaudi (2012: 296) on Willson (2010).

also be particularly productive to trace women's political history by reconstructing individual and collective paths through biographical analysis and family history.

Starting from these introductory considerations, in the following pages we will tackle three main themes, within which the interpretation of the female protagonists of this book will be positioned: the contribution that family history and biographical analysis have made to women's political history; the issue of backwardness/development, tradition/modernity; the relation between history and memory. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Its first goal is to demonstrate the potentialities of family history and biographical analysis in reconstructing women's political history, using family archives and women's writings. The second and more general aim is to show how women's history can help to revise stereotypes and established interpretations of Italian history, going beyond a vision of the nation's history as marked only by excelling or only by lagging behind (Benigno and Mineo 2020).

9.2 Individuals and Citizens: The Contribution of Family History and Biography to Women's Political History

The latest studies encourage us to recombine social history with political history, focussing on the various public and private spaces where women's participation unfolds. To do so, they urge us to reconstruct the figures of women in their public/private experience, in a generational, relational perspective. One interesting contribution in this direction applied to Italy is that of Mori et al. (2014), who reconstruct

> the processes of female participation that the birth [of the nation] triggered and accelerated [...] what it meant for Italian women, the varied spaces where they were establishing an active role, not only and not mainly political, in the making of contemporary Italy. (15)

The stated aim of the book is to revise deep-rooted stereotypes about male power and about the 'woman tied to her body', and to give priority to 'a close connection between gender history and women's history, between social history and cultural history' (Mori et al. 2014: 18). To retrace this story, to 'explore in a new way the social, and therefore historical, construction of the male and the female' the curators chose

'generation' as the concept capable of 'undermining' the separate study of the public/political sphere as opposed to the private sphere. Accordingly, they pay special attention to defining and flexibly historicising the category of 'generation', and to including some female biographies in the generations, which allows them to 'reintroduce the individual into the historical account' and 'enhance the plural nature of women and men' (19). Therefore, the generational approach, chosen as the hermeneutical key, is interwoven with the biographical angle, designed to trace and accentuate the presence of the many women, often unknown, in the different periods of the history of Italy since unification.

Both perspectives are present in this book, in the reconstruction of the life stories of Harriet Lathrop Dunham, Alice Hallgarten, Cora Slocomb, Carolina de Viti de Marco and the young women of the De Viti de Marco-Starace family, the sisters Lucia and Giulia Starace, and their cousin Lucia de Viti de Marco. Their interpretative approach has produced original, unexpected results on the political role played by these women in contexts and ways that cannot be attributed to the most established interpretations of existing historiography, which give priority to the more developed and dynamic geographical areas and women's political militancy in parties and trade unions. Equally unpredictable were the links between the experiences of women, so different and yet so similar in their cultural and political aspiration towards a social protagonism which was also political. The women examined here reveal life trajectories that were complex and pluralistic in terms of the paths they took to assert their individuality. Think, for instance, of Carolina de Viti de Marco, and her difficult decision to separate from her husband after years of marriage within the distrustful male-dominated context of the periphery of south-eastern Italy; or of her stubborn defence of her educational role in female vocational training in a predominantly male school like the Art School Applied to Industry (see Chapter 5). At the same time, the biographies of these women demonstrate their participation and protagonism in the social field, their ability to promote employment and welfare activities, which would prove to be enduring over time, and decisive for the autonomy of the weaker members of society. In other words, they indicate the journey undertaken both to be individuals and to become citizens. With great cogency, Mori et al. argue that:

> We are convinced that individual stories can illuminate general themes by providing perspectives that result in knowledge: the focus on single experiences redefines and recomposes those same opposing pairs that women's history has challenged, such as public/private, presence/absence, inclusion/exclusion. The lives of people dwell in all these spaces, and history that can take this into account is capable of breaking down the traditionalisms and artificial fences between the political, the cultural, the social, making historical time intersect with the time of lived experience. (2014: 19–20)

For some time now, the attention of historiography has been drawn to the scientific potentialities of biographical analysis, though with an urgency to avoid facile infatuations and glorification of the subjects investigated. There has been a great demand to adopt it in the field of women's history (Loriga 2006; Varikas 1996; Casalena 2012). The biographical dimension enables the network of family and social relations to be reconstructed, along with the paths of cross-fertilisation between historical-cultural models and subjective experience. It also allows us 'to observe the ways each individual is positioned and moves in the social space, continuously changing it' (Calanca 2004: 205). In the essays presented in this volume, biographical analysis is interwoven with family history, in order to study family strategies and reconstruct social relationships. Today, we have moved beyond the studies initiated by Peter Laslett and which circulated all over Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, favouring a quantitative investigation of family structure (Laslett 1968; see also Salvatici 2009). The focal point of theoretical reflection and research is currently the relational world of which the family is part. A fundamental contribution in this direction was made by Levi (1985; see Lanaro 2011), who, as Franco Ramella writes,

> proposed replacing the study of the structures with the analysis of family strategies, which requires the reconstruction of the relations external to the domestic group, without which it is hard to grasp the meaning of choices, because it is precisely the relations established with the outside world that are the tool of the strategies. (2000: 7)

It is therefore necessary to use a different viewpoint in studying the family 'to make it a way of studying society'.

Hence the need to adopt a relational perspective both on the internal analysis of the family and on its relations with civil society. For the

first aspect, it is therefore possible to reconstruct the relations between the sexes and the relation between the generations, which 'enables the plurality of forms of relations to be interpreted as hubs in a multiplicity of generational stories that are constantly being interwoven' (Calanca 2004: 205). For the second aspect, the danger to avoid is that of levelling the role of the family and seeing it as the 'central institution in civil society', without grasping the 'biunivocal' process between family and civil society. On this point, Paul Ginsborg (2010) points out that either some members of the family become part of civil society or elements of civil society 'enter' the family. Therefore, rather than adopting the traditional division between the private and public spheres, what is stressed is the analysis 'of the modes of connection between families and civil society'. It is no coincidence that the more recent orientations in historiography indicate the need to study the relationship between the family and historical change and specifically the links between individuals, families, civil society and the state (Asquer et al. 2010). Such perspectives and orientations, as we have said, become a productive key to understanding the history and political culture of women who are found to have unexpected roles, strategies and knowledge in the study of the social relations that families had with each other and with other individuals.

The focus of the analysis in the essays of this book is not only on women, but on the relational world to which they and their families belonged; the relations formed with society became the main instrument in their political strategies. What emerges is a spider-web of local and supra-local relations that reveal a complex, dynamic social reality at a European level, in both the private and the public spheres. A clear international profile also emerges, not so much due to the geographical origin of some of them (as in the case of the Americans Harriet Lathrop Dunham and Cora Slocomb, or the American of German Jewish origin Alice Hallgarten), but in their cosmopolitan background and the fact that they all took part in the cultural and political ferment of the age: women's emancipation, feminism, pacifism and anti-colonialism.

Their biographies and the complex interweaving of their local/national/international relations provide food for thought on the link between women's history and world history. However, world history has aroused more bewilderment than agreement out of a fear of annulling or underestimating the differences and specificities typical of women's history (Capuzzo and Vezzosi 2005). Hence the proposal to adopt instead a transnational approach that considers a multiplicity of

areas and contexts, their connections and their interrelations (Capuzzo and Vezzosi 2005; see also Di Fiore and Meriggi 2011). World history is however a spatial perspective that enables us to overcome political boundaries and the Eurocentric approach, and to bring together the multiple interconnections between different worlds in which the early twentieth-century feminist activists operated and wove the threads of a female internationalism (see Baritono 2007; Bini and Testi 2009). This concerned the themes of peace, emancipation, feminism, work, the liberation of the weak—whether women, children or the disabled—both in the industrialised societies of Europe and North America, and in the more backward areas of southern Europe and South Africa. This is illustrated here by Cora Slocomb's work in favour of the first international movement for peace and disarmament, the founding of the American Council of Women, the campaign against the death penalty (Chapter 4), or Etta and Carolina de Viti de Marco's commitment and support for the activities assisting the Anglo-Boer populations promoted by Emily Hobhouse in South Africa, where the worst consequences of European nations' imperialist policies were being played out. The two sisters-in-law did not hesitate to encourage the departure of the young Lucia Starace, Carolina's eldest daughter, who was only eighteen, for a village in South Africa to promote the establishment and running of a lace school, greatly desired by Emily Hobhouse (see Chapter 6). They were therefore giving her an opportunity to experience cultural growth outside the common schemes prevailing in the aristocratic and upper-middle-class world to which they belonged. As Part II shows, Carolina and Etta de Viti de Marco handed down their values and political experience to their daughters, who then adapted the spaces, themes and political practices of their activity without betraying the fundamental values of their mothers. Thus, there emerges a female and feminist elite, active even in the contradictory, outlying reality of Italy, in a long-term perspective that enables us to know not only their political activity but also the political culture of women committed to peace, opposed to discrimination and marginalisation, who were fighting for women's rights and social liberation.

The first generation of women studied in Part I share the broad cultural and political yearnings that characterise the 'new woman' of the early 1900s: the battle for emancipation and the vote, 'practical feminism' that inspired their feverish social, welfare and educational activities, with a strong awareness of being both a woman and a mother capable of

transforming the family and society. But they also shared the fragility of their human existences. We only need to recall Cora Slocomb's mental anguish, which constrained her for almost forty years, isolating her from the intense world of entrepreneurial initiatives and social activities she had undertaken. We might also consider the short life of Alice Hallgarten, an untiring supporter of the pedagogist Maria Montessori and her method, who died when she was only thirty-seven after promoting and establishing numerous activities, schools for children and weaving workshops, faithful to her philosophy of life of giving work and education rather than alms (Chapter 3). And finally, we might think of the degenerative illness suffered by Etta de Viti de Marco during her final years, which were marked by devastating family tragedy (Chapter 2). The exception was Carolina de Viti de Marco, who had a long life that was nonetheless troubled (Chapter 5). In her memoire, she outlined that long line of values, practices, feelings and aspirations which—in different forms—are visible in the lives of her daughters, Lucia and Giulia Starace, and her niece, Lucia de Viti de Marco. In this second generation, the biographical and generational interpretative key makes it possible to reconstruct a female activism that was manifested between the 1940s and the 1960s and totally different from that of their mothers in the early 1900s, to which however it is anchored. The political, cultural and social aims of the first generation have taken on new forms but they are still nurtured by an engagement with the cultural springs of modernism, religious reform and the innovative health and education theories of Steiner and Montessori (Chapter 6).

The stories of these women reveal a man/woman and husband/wife relationship reinterpreted as complicity and/or otherness. Cora Slocomb's husband, Count Detalmo Savorgnan di Brazzà, shared his wife's values and entrepreneurial initiatives, supporting her by acting as the secretary of Italian Female Industries (IFI), of which she was president (Chapter 4). Etta de Viti de Marco carried on an intense cultural and relational activity to support and promote the scientific and political work of her husband, Antonio de Viti de Marco, an esteemed economist and deputy elected several times to Parliament (Chapter 1). Leopoldo Franchetti gave full moral and economic support to the welfare and educational initiatives promoted by his young wife Alice Hallgarten (Chapter 3). Carolina de Viti de Marco, on the other hand, like her daughter Lucia, did not hesitate to break up the marriage when faced with the authoritarianism of their respective husbands, which made

their lives difficult as women and citizens (Chapters 5 and 6). The mother/daughters/sons relationship in the case of Carolina and Etta de Viti de Marco is also worth reflecting upon and their presence/absence was due to their political and entrepreneurial commitments, but also to their great interest in the upbringing and education of their daughters—albeit delegated to carefully guided tutors—and the respect shown for their choices in life.

In short, they had difficult lives, lives committed to affirming their individuality and to achieving a social and political role of their own, but also to transforming the situation in which the protagonists operated, and to creating life and work opportunities for women and the more vulnerable. Accordingly, they reveal the existence of strong networks of national and international relations, the participation as protagonists in the emancipation movement of the early 1900s, and above all, the endorsement of work, especially the art of embroidery and weaving, as an instrument of autonomy for women and for their emancipation.

9.3 Backwardness/Development, Tradition/Modernity: Philanthropy and the Origin of the Welfare State

One of the common threads linking these cosmopolitan upper-class women is the philanthropic activity they promoted and carried out between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which in some cases was revived and updated by their daughters and granddaughters between the 1940s and the 1960s. They generally operated in poor rural areas, such as Friuli in northern Italy in the case of Cora Slocomb, Umbria in Central Italy for Alice Hallgarten, and Salento in the extreme periphery of southern Apulia for Etta and Carolina de Viti de Marco and their descendants. In those areas, far removed from the ongoing industrial development, new opportunities were experienced and activities and initiatives were undertaken for the emancipation and education of the most vulnerable members of the population. Some of these women (such as Alice Hallgarten and Harriet Lathrop Dunham) also lived in a family atmosphere imbued with the cultural and political drive of their respective husbands, engaged in the battle for the development of Southern Italy, such as Leopoldo Franchetti and Antonio de Viti de Marco. This book allows their numerous activities to be reconstructed, as well as the role

they played from generation to generation, always moving between the local, national and international spheres. These are important results in terms of scientific research, and they are all the more significant insofar as they concern the social, political, cultural and economic dynamics that characterised seemingly marginal situations, as in the case of the school founded by Carolina and Etta de Viti de Marco in Casamassella, a rural centre in the south of Apulia. These results help to introduce a new perspective and to overcome the stereotypes and *clichés* regarding the backwardness of the South from the liberal age to today, on its isolation and its place on the cultural and social periphery.

In the last thirty years, Italian historiography has produced innovative contributions on southern history, inviting us to use the concept of 'complexity' when interpreting the dynamics of the South and to adopt three different levels of analysis in studying and making sense of it: the history of the real processes that marked the South during the various stages of Italian history; the construction of the 'Southern question', based on the thought and political struggle of some of its protagonists[5]; and Meridionalism, a cultural movement and political project in favour of the South. More recent studies have reconstructed the picture of Southern Italy, analysed and interpreted in a European and international dimension, investigated in its territorial and social nuances, considered a reality 'in motion', pressured by drives for and against change. Some historians[6] have constantly rejected the false claims that the South is backward and immobile, and have invited historians, observers and politicians to adopt a 'cross-eyed' view in order to grasp, on the one hand, the changes and transformations of Southern Italy during its more than one hundred and fifty years of history since unification,[7] and on the other, the persistence and continuity between the South's level of development and that of the rest of Italy.[8] Specific attention has been paid to the study of the southern and Apulian upper middle classes, highlighting the existence not only of backward, parasitic landowning and professional categories, but also the widespread presence of a productive, active bourgeoisie at a European

[5] These included Pasquale Villari, Leopoldo Franchetti, Giustino Fortunato, Gaetano Salvemini, Francesco Saverio Nitti and Antonio de Viti de Marco.

[6] Specially Galasso (1983).

[7] The unification of Italy took place in 1861.

[8] See Lupo (2015), Cassese (2016), and Pescosolido (2017). For Apulia, see Denitto (2005, 2007).

level in the professions, participating in the great changes taking place and engaged in innovative processes of political, economic, social and cultural transformation (Rizzo 2015, 2016). The study of the case of the De Viti de Marco-Starace families published in the second part of this book, which reconstructs the innovative initiatives introduced by Etta and Carolina de Viti de Marco and the dogged opposition they encountered, highlights the difficulties and resistance to change on the part of the most backward circles of southern society.

Philanthropic activity was one of the main paths chosen by the feminist movement of the early 1900s. The women examined here took part in the process of emancipation and the first wave of feminism: in the case of Cora Slocomb and Harriet Lathrop Dunham, they were active protagonists, holding public offices. In Italy, there was a composite, pluralist movement marked by the presence of such different orientations, ideas and tendencies that the writer Sibilla Aleramo evoked the myth of Tower of Babel to indicate the feminist question.[9] The women active in the movement promoted multiple initiatives and had different cultural and political backgrounds, ranging from the suffragist spirit, more committed to claiming political and civil rights, to the maternal or social spirit, which gave political depth to the traditional female activities of care, assistance and education. The Italian emancipationists were bourgeois and aristocratic; among them, there was a significant presence of feminists from other countries, especially the United States. It is not surprising that the Italians were greatly influenced by theories developed abroad, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. The contact and exchange networks were often informal and were also built up through friendships or at elite social events. In this sense, a leading role was played by gatherings in salons where the upper-middle class and aristocrats socialised (De Giorgio 1992; Buttafuoco 1997; Gazzetta 2018). The collaboration, also through the various associations that had been created in the meantime, lasted through the first decade of the twentieth century. Willson indicates a date and an event that marked the peak of the movement's political visibility and its theoretical and cultural elaboration, but also the origin of 'an irreparable fracture' and the end of the collaboration between Catholic and secular emancipationists: this was the first national conference of Italian women,

[9] This is an expression mentioned by Willson (2010: 25). On the use of terms such as 'emancipationism, 'feminism' or 'first-wave feminism' in Italian historiography, see Willson (2019).

organised by the National Council of Italian Women (CNDI) in April 1908. Many of the activists in the CNDI shared and pursued the aims of the Italian Female Industries (IFI, see Chapter 1). It is this very connection, previously overlooked, that links the experience of the protagonists of this book, notwithstanding the fact that they were involved in different areas, and that their social, cultural and friendship networks were close in some cases and very distant in others. Embroidery, seen as a social enterprise and a political activity in the broad sense, is what indicates their capacity for action, work, transformation and innovation. Their experience combines philanthropy and work, activities pursued by the CNDI, and which are generally regarded as 'a means of social control that could prevent unrest' (Willson 2010: 36). For a correct interpretation of the philanthropic activity promoted by the feminist movement, it is in fact necessary to take up and develop Annarita Buttafuoco's reflections on methodology and research. Many years ago, the Italian historian was already arguing that the activities promoted by practical feminism were anything but traditional and that they had to be reconstructed in their daily practices. She also maintained that assistance was designed to reduce social deprivation and to open the way to civil and political rights for women. In other words, she pointed to the culture and emancipationist practise of practical feminism as the genesis of the welfare state in Italy.[10]

One of the distinctive features of practical feminism, and more generally of the 'new woman' of the early 1900s, was the social value attributed to motherhood, and the association of motherhood with the concept of citizenship. Studies on the social commitment of women in the early 1900s actually refer to the theme of motherhood, linking it to the concept of citizenship and interpreting the numerous activities promoted for employment, the vote, and education of the weaker individuals in society as 'maternalistic practices [...] at the origin of the welfare state'.[11]

Undoubtedly, the public enhancement of maternal feeling accompanies the transition to the modern female ideal type envisaged for the 1900s: the strong, active woman, engaged in social work but also a well-informed mother. (Mori et al. 2014: 23)

[10] See Buttafuoco (1997, 1988). On the importance of the methodological and scientific contribution of Annarita Buttafuoco, see, among others, Rossi Doria (2001), Gabrielli (2001, 2002), and De Clementi (2016).

[11] See Mori et al. (2014) who refer to the stimulating analyses that were proposed in this direction at the beginning of the 1990s by Thane and Bock (1991).

This was the same perspective in which Maria Montessori's activity was seen with her 'pedagogy as social motherhood' (De Giorgio 2014; Babini 2014).

In the life experiences of the protagonists of this volume, there is a dynamic coexistence of tradition and modernity; they focussed on embroidery and craftsmanship, sectors generally considered traditional and linked to pre-modern lifestyles, but they imbued them with roles, function and meaning for the social, economic and political transformation of women, even the poorest, as Marisa Forcina underlines in her contribution to this book (Chapter 8). Cora Slocomb promoted a large enterprise in Friuli, one of the poorest parts of northern Italy, offering her skills, her international network of friends and the dynamism of her Anglo-Saxon cultural background to the work ethic and individual rights. She was profoundly convinced—like Etta and Carolina de Viti de Marco and Alice Hallgarten—that work was an important stimulus for the emancipation and dignity of women, especially the poor and exploited. Embroidery was seen as a major factor for the training of women and their entry into the world of work through the cooperatively organised embroidery schools she founded for the production and subsequent marketing of the products in Europe and the United States (Chapter 4).

Such strengths, as Laurenzi states in Part II, debunk the stereotype of embroidery as a traditional activity and of craftsmanship as an expression of a pre-industrial society, and they highlight its transformative function for female workers and for the artefact, incorporating innovation and tradition. We only need to think of the originality of the embroideries designed by Cora Slocomb with the skill and taste she had acquired in Munich and her ability to develop the manual skills of the young women in her schools where ancient working methods were used. We can also reflect on the creative effort and original research for designs by Etta and Carolina de Viti de Marco, who stubbornly claimed the intellectual property rights to the lace designs used in the girls' section of the Art school applied to industry. As we have seen, many of the activities established in Friuli, Umbria and Apulia did not fizzle out with the death of their founders; in some cases, they were resumed and updated in initiatives designed to promote the recovery of those crafts, still combining tradition and innovation and enhancing traditional and territorial vocations from a glocal perspective.

Finally, it must be said that even though the women studied here were forward-thinking democratic members of the elites of the enlightened

aristocracy and upper-middle classes in business and the professions, they struggled to deal with the emergence of mass society and the leading role claimed by collective movements. However, they are indicative of the existence of a female bourgeoisie, which was a factor of change in its international openness, cultural relations, entrepreneurial activity and social commitment. These women managed to implement processes of social and cultural transformation designed to transform the philanthropic action they had undertaken into an activity of employment and support for working-class women as a prelude to culture and to 'welfare' policies (Gemelli 2014; Nunin and Vezzosi 2007).

9.4 History and Memory

The scientific and methodological results presented and discussed in this book were based on the use of an extremely rich documentation, in many cases unpublished, sourced from libraries and archives, both public and private. Of fundamental importance for the analytical perspectives chosen were family archives, in their capacity as repositories of individual and family memory. Family papers are indispensable when reconstructing the intricate networks of family and social relationships, as well as of inter-family relationships, while also revealing the individual subjective paths taken by its members. The archives of aristocratic and upper-middle-class families contain different kinds of female writings, essential for reconstructing the often-hidden traces of women's political actions (Contini and Scattigno 2005; Guidi 2004; Zarri 1999).

In the various case studies presented in this volume, the different ways these women wrote are illuminating, ranging from letters and correspondence to diaries, autobiographies, family memories, through public interventions, literary, historical and scientific writings. They allow us to analyse various levels of the subjectivity of their authors and their presence in civil society as well as their intense social, intra-family and personal relationships. The letters and correspondence in particular are exceptionally valuable sources for the history of women and, more generally, for historical research, and therefore they need to be analysed with methodological rigour and subjected to critical analysis and contextualised interpretation. Their analytical potential offers scholars the possibility of capturing the mood of women, reconstructing their feelings, desires, dreams, illusions, weaknesses, contradictions and pains. The papers in the family archives

are very rich in this sense; suffice it to mention, for example, the writings by Cora Slocomb (quoted in Chapter 4), or the *Annales* written by Carolina de Viti de Marco (see Chapter 5).

Equally useful for the long-term reconstruction of the actions of the women dealt with in this book, and for reflecting on the social, cultural and political heritage of their 'political' action, are the testimonies and interviews here mentioned.[12] But in this case, we need to examine the relationship between memory and historical knowledge, pointing out that they are not the same thing. Memory is necessarily subjective, whether it be individual or group memory. It is selective, instinctive and disorganised. Segments of memory arrange themselves in the long past, which yields different traces or sources. Memories arouse emotions and involvement. History is founded on an effort to achieve scientific knowledge; it analyses sources and puts forward possible interpretations with the primary aim of understanding the past. It requires an in-depth analysis. It is a process of constantly growing knowledge (Bloch 1949). History and memory feed on each other and must therefore proceed hand in hand, especially when faced with today's situation, which seems to have lost any long-term vision and depth of analysis. Historians assign a central role to memory, which is considered an essential element of the individual and collective identity.

Delving into memory is one of the fundamental activities of present-day individuals and society. One of the most intriguing historians of the twentieth century, Jacques Le Goff (1977/1992: 99), writes that:

> Memory, on which history draws and which it nourishes in return, seeks to save the past in order to serve the present and the future. Let us act in such a way that collective memory may serve the liberation and not the enslavement of human beings.

But celebratory rituals, media simplification and political exploitation can lead to separate memory and, therefore, to intolerance or, at the other extreme, to indifference. Anna Rossi Doria's methodological and historiographic reflections on this point are stimulating. She has on many occasions (especially in her work on women and the Shoah) stressed the importance of the relation between the present and the past, but she has also expressed concern about the public use of history, the fragmentation

[12] Collected by Elena Laurenzi in her study (Laurenzi 2018).

of history into a myriad of individual memories, into separate pasts that end up fostering separate memories, opposing and identitarian, undermining the compactness of historical interpretations (Rossi-Doria 2012, 2017). The collection of testimonies presented by Laurenzi in this book (Chapter 7) is an example of how to successfully revive the subjective and collective memory that has accumulated around the protagonists of this story over time. In conclusion, through historical knowledge and memory we can trace the heritage of ideas and community bonds in which women have played a political role in the broad sense. In other words, it can help build a culture of social possibility and a system of plural cultures, working to overcome indifference, rediscover pride in one's roots and encourage the participation of women and men in the democratic life of the community.

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